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# Soviet belligerence may hasten new CIA charter

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The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan may succeed in galvanizing Congress into at last producing a charter of do's and don'ts for the Central Intelligence Agency.

But by hardening attitudes of many senators and congressmen toward the Soviets, the invasion also is stimulating support for a three-part "package" of changes which would fall far short of a comprehensive CIA charter.

A charter would set down guidelines and restrictions for the CIA across the board. But the package being talked about by some congressmen and possibly getting quiet support from some administration officials and former intelligence officers would:

1. Reduce the number of watchdog Senate and House committees which oversee secret CIA operations.
2. Make it a federal crime for a person to reveal the identity of an undercover agent.
3. Tighten provisions of the Freedom of Information Act which currently allow private citizens access to a wide range of classified documents.

All three proposed changes disturb civil libertarians who recall past CIA abuses. But they apparently delight those who would like to revive CIA operations aimed at exerting secret American influence overseas.

According to Hugh Tovar, a former high-ranking CIA official who once organized the agency's support for tribesmen fighting the North Vietnamese in Laos, covert CIA action has until recently "shown all the earmarks of a dying art form."

Writing on intelligence requirements for the 1980s in a booklet published by the National Strategy Information Center, Mr. Tovar declares that the US today "has, for all practical purposes, restricted itself to clandestine collection of intelligence. Covert action no longer figures significantly in the operational posture of the CIA."

Long before the invasion of Afghanistan, however, Senate and House members detected a shift in American public opinion in favor of increased CIA activity, albeit under continued restrictions.

A Gallup poll conducted for the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations in late 1978 showed a marked increase in the number of Americans who felt the CIA should work inside other countries to try to strengthen those elements which serve the interests of the United States and weaken those forces that work against US interests. In 1974, 43 percent said they favored such CIA operations. By 1978 the number had increased to 59 percent.

Afghanistan reinforced interest in the possible increased use of the CIA to help counter the Soviets, and Sen. Walter Huddleston (D) of Kentucky, who heads the Senate subcommittee on intelligence charters, wants to harness that impulse to get the Senate to act on long-promised intelligence charters.

One of his problems is that the CIA charter which his subcommittee plans to propose is likely to disappoint two of the groups which have lobbied hardest to shape that charter to their liking: on the one hand, the civil libertarians who want to impose the strictest of legal standards on the CIA; on the other, former intelligence officers and others who want the US to go back to extensive secret operations.

Senator Huddleston says his subcommittee is close to agreement with the White House on a charter that would include all the three "packaged" points favored by those who want to support and protect the intelligence agencies: reduction of oversight committees, federal penalties for those who expose undercover agents, and tighter freedom of information provisions.

"Without being overly restrictive," he said in an interview, the charter would include numerous curbs on possible CIA abuses.

"There will still have to be presidential approval for high security risk operations," he explained. "The administration will have to show that such an operation is important to national security. . . . It will have to give an assessment of what damage would be done to the country if the operation failed or was exposed."

There is a concession to those who want to loosen restrictions in this, however. Previous proposals before the Senate Intelligence Committee would have required that such operations be "essential" to national security and not just "important."

Senator Huddleston said the charter would prohibit the CIA from engaging in assassinations, torture, and other violence. But he added that it was not yet clear whether assisting in the overthrow of democratic governments would be categorically prohibited.

The most talked-about change under consideration would be to reduce from eight to two the number of watchdog Senate and House committees which oversee secret CIA operations. White House and CIA officials have been arguing that the large number of committees that now have to be informed of such operations has had a "chilling effect," causing the government to abstain from undertaking even the smallest of covert operations for fear that, through leaks from senators and representatives, such operations would be exposed and compromised.

But the public suffers from two "misperceptions," Senator Huddleston says. "One is that the intelligence agencies are totally hamstrung now. I don't buy that.

"The other is that the charters will just turn them loose so that they can go back to the good old days. That's not correct either."

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